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AN ADRIATIC CRUISE

BY GERTRUDE SLAUGHTER

CURIOSLY enough, it was in the summer of the Armistice that I first realized my life-long dream of a "cruise" along the shores of Dalmatia; and in the trend of what unforeseen and unimaginable events! It was the strangest of all cruises; and I remember that one June morning, as I stood on an Italian destroyer in the harbor of Spalato, within a stone's throw of Admiral Andrews's flagship and surrounded by many grey units of the Allies' fleets; as I looked across the water into Diocletian's pleasure palace and down the shore toward the fairy-like city of Trau—so graceful and fragile that it, too, might be called, like the island settlement in the bay, a "Little Venice"—I found myself wishing that I were again on the deck of my friends' sloop in Eggemoggin Reach where I used to lie and dream of sailing among the islands of the Quarnero and down the Adriatic to Cattaro and Corfu.

Because, for all the fascination of my Adriatic cruise, when I sailed on ships of every shape and every degree of comfort down to zero; when I went on shore among people of many races—strange types out of the Orient mingling in the streets with our boys from Kansas and Nebraska; black Senegalese keeping guard in front of orange-colored villas (not ebony slaves in the service of grand ladies, as in old paintings, but armed representatives of France); the ancient race of the Morlacchi, in the gorgeous colors of their embroidered and hand-woven garments, dancing in the village square; red-capped Serbs on top of the high fortress walls of Ragusa that rise from the sea and close in about groups of Slavic people buying and selling under the shadow of sculptured facades of Italian workmanship; long-robed Croatian priests acting as custodians of relics of imperial Rome—in spite of all this variety and charm

and the beauty of mountains and sea, I found life more than ever perplexing, bewildering, insolvable. The chaotic condition of the Adriatic weighed upon the spirit.

For on those shores the armistice had not prepared the way for peace but for a new form of war. It was not that every port had assumed a warlike aspect, the Allies having sent their fleets to occupy every harbor—the Americans at Spalato, the French and Serbians at Ragusa, the English at Cattaro, the Italians at Zara and Sebenico, and all of them together at Fiume. Even at Venice, where the four groups of Italian ships were alone throughout the war, moving in and out with military precision from their anchorage in the lagoons to their work of eternal vigilance in open sea, there was a less striking show of war during the conflict than after the armistice, when battleships of Great Britain and France and America and Japan entered the Great Basin and a British submarine raised its mysterious head between the campaniles of San Marco and San Giorgio Maggiore. But the enemy fleet lay captive; and these signs of war were in reality the seal of peace. The new form of war was silent and invisible. It was a conflict of age-old traditions, of deep-seated allegiances, of racial instincts, of national pride and aspirations, of ambitions and hopes and resentments and affiliations—all the elements of past and future wars, there where the blue waters shine with such exceeding brilliance and bright green shores climb up the hill-sides till they lose their color in the greys and golden browns of the rugged mountain range.

Sailing along the steep shores of Istria (the first lap of my cruise) toward Fiume and the Julian Alps, one passes innumerable villages perched high on the hills or clinging to the low shores, every one raising an Italian campanile as a signpost of its civilization. And already in these sparkling waters, with the old intoxication of the sea stirring one's blood, the complex problem was wedging itself into one's thoughts, preventing the carefree mood of happy sailing days. The campaniles gave to every grey village the appearance of a fragment of Venice. Yet I knew that farther inland there were Slavic churches. I had seen them in the interior, and their resemblance to the small churches of Germany had reminded me of the frequent comment upon the Croats of this region, that they are the most

Germanized of all the Slavs. Here was another simple fact to increase the complexity of the problem!

As we made our way between the rugged shore and the purple islands, past many-colored Abbazzia lying so low in the curve of the hills that it seemed to be floating on the waters of the bay, the cloud-topped Julian Alps were ahead of us, stretching down from the misty north and dropping their clear, sharp cliffs into the sea, and nearer, circling its harbor and wandering back among the hills, the town of Fiume. And now again the beauty of the sight was disturbed with questionings. Surely those mountains made a natural wall for Italy. It was there, we remembered, that Dante had placed the boundary of his country. That mountain range had served the ancient Romans for a wall of defense. We remembered that to the patriots who created the modern nation, United Italy was to extend to the Julian Alps—beyond Fiume. Nature, it was clear, was on their side. A society of nations might make the argument of natural boundaries seem antiquated: the West might no longer need to protect its civilization by keeping out the East. But there is something compelling beyond argument in the aspect of nature's provisions: and we entered the city convinced that Fiume and her port were but incidents compared with the enduring fact of that mountain range.

But once in Fiume, all that was changed. There one was aware of the immediate human problem. The architecture might be Venetian or southern Slav; the mountains might stand firm or perish; the claims of human beings must be settled on other grounds. Indeed, as one descends the coast, although nature and architecture combine into an ever clearer and more convincing argument, the prospect of a just settlement seems to grow fainter and farther away.

At Fiume we took ship to Spalato. Searching for sailings to Dalmatian ports, we found but one, a small French liner bound for Spalato; whereupon Spalato became our destination. The rest we left to fate. Indeed, our cruise was less a cruise than a journey of vagabonds. And yet not that either; for while at times we were begging passage on any tub afloat, at another time we sailed on a finely equipped destroyer where a faultless table d'hôte in the cabin was followed by cigars and liqueurs on deck under

a canopy, where we might sit on the high bridge beside the pilot and the Commander with a chart in front of the window through which we watched a swiftly changing panorama of sea and headlands and straits and wooded shores; where but for the Italian commander's tales of dangerous encounters near this island or that as we passed them one would have forgotten that there had been a war and that Italy had become all but bankrupt thereby.

Starting in the late afternoon on the little French steamer, we had soon passed the famous Rock of Saint Mark, the last buttress of the Julian Alps rising from the sea. In the opinion of the Italians who oppose the acquisition of Dalmatia, this *Rocco di San Marco* is the rightful outpost of Italy. We steamed on between the two large islands of the Quarnero, Veglia and Cherso, and among many smaller islands floating on a many-colored sea. We sailed on into the night. That the voyage was made at night, regrettable as it was, furnished proof of the strategic value of this coast. From Venice to Pola, from Pola to Fiume, no steamer yet ventured in the dark over Austrian mines. But the entire eastern shore is one long harbor, from which submarines could be excluded and where there was no need of mines. It was a free operating base for the Austrian fleet. Italians told us of their amazement all through the war at the sight of ships of ammunition moving down inside the islands, quite unmolested, protected by the only kind of wall effective in modern warfare.

In the morning we found ourselves in the harbor of Spalato, amid crowds of vessels and fishing smacks and close to the palace of Diocletian inside of which the town is built. In recent times the city has spread out beyond the limits of the palace to form a new quarter which contrasts strangely with the older town embedded curiously in crumbling walls, Roman arches and towers rising beside the doorways or within the courtyards of dwelling houses. Yet even now the windows of Diocletian's dwelling house, in the long wall that faces the quay, look out from the most desirable apartments in Spalato. "Only the rich can live there," a plain citizen informed us.

One's thoughts may escape for a moment from the conflict of races to dwell with pleasure upon the splendor of Diocletian's halls and courts and baths and gardens and temples and theatres. But close upon that reflection presses

the sombre story of the parasite settlement. A massacre of the Christian inhabitants of the neighboring city of Salona, during inroads of barbarians, had driven the surviving population to seek refuge in the islands. Up to that time, it seems, the famous palace had stood intact, respected alike by builders and barbarians. But now these exiles from Salona, lured by the love of home, ventured back to the mainland and fortified themselves inside the spacious palace, in its lofty towers and vast subterranean crypts. Hence, perhaps, the origin of the name, Spalato, *ex palatio*, built out of a palace.

Much of the palace still remains—the Golden Gate, the Peristyle, walls and arches and cornices and sculptured vaultings, the Temple which served the Christians for a baptistry, and the octagonal Mausoleum transformed into a Christian church. Hidden away in the narrow streets, and often lost to the visitor, are beauties of architecture of many types and periods, and in the square by the Duomo, adorned with the impressive peristyle and overtopped by a campanile that must have been beautiful indeed before its unhappy restoration, one might study the art of Italy in every stage from imperial Rome, through the honest crudities of early Christian carving, on to higher types of workmanship, until, in the sculptures of Giorgio di Sebenico, one is in the full tide of the Renaissance. The Public Hall is Venetian Gothic—and if, in our brief visit, we failed to discover all the types and all the treasures, it was perhaps because our guide, the Curator of the Museum, spent the time recounting his trip to Paris and reviewing the arguments he had presented there for the Slavs against the Latins.

By the kindness of an American officer we were driven by motor to Salona and thence to Trau. The young marine who acted as chauffeur was full of enthusiasm for the beauty of the country. "If you will stay another day," he said, "I will show you scenery that will put the Grand Canyon of the Colorado in the shade." And as we looked into the mountains, rising one above another, higher and higher against the sky, we could almost believe him.

Here we were beyond the limits of Italy's official claim, which includes only the northern section of Dalmatia as far as Sebenico, but well within the boundary set up by Gabriele D'Annunzio, whose desire is to "redeem" the farthest shore washed by the Adriatic Sea. Spalato became a sore spot

after the Armistice, and Prof. Danielli's report on the treatment of Italians by Serbs and Croats in that region did much to strengthen the D'Annunzio party. We saw few Italians, though the books in the chief store in the chief city square attested their presence. There was reason enough for their keeping quiet, if Prof. Danielli's account is true. Now, since the American occupation, it was the Slavic population who were always at swords' points with one another. "We are called upon to settle some dispute nearly every day," they told us. "It is petty warfare all the time."

These Slavic people, it became clear on questioning them, want neither Italy nor Serbia to control them. They want to govern themselves. To place unwilling Italians under the Croats and then turn unwilling Croats over to Serbia seems a poor solution of the problem. A better one must be found if that righteous dream of Tommaseo and other Italian patriots of Dalmatia is to be realized—a friendly union between Italy and the southern Slavs.

We discussed the situation, at different places along the coast, with the younger officers of our American ships. It was clear that to them the problem of the Adriatic is not properly a problem but a condition. It is that there, among those ancient races, the Past looms up like an ogre to combat the Present and defeat the Future. These American boys see no virtue in the past. They scorn tradition; and their familiarity with the facts of history is not their outstanding trait. "Italy," said one of them, "has never done any good to the world. She has done only harm." Because the Croats have little to their credit except hopes for the future, it is only a square deal, they think, to give them their turn upon this soil, even if their instincts should lead them to tear down the beautiful stones of Venice, in Ragusa, in Zara, in Trau and Sebenico. Moreover, the free and easy ways of the Yugoslavs are more pleasing to the average young American than the more conventional ways of the Italians. An anecdote may give a clue to their state of mind:

"I liked the Italians at first," a young lieutenant said, "but never again!" And then he told us how once in Pola he had come into possession of a rare treasure, a Virginia ham. What should he do with it? He bethought himself of two girls he knew, an Italian and a Yugoslav. He knew them equally well and liked them equally, so that it was impossible to choose between them. He therefore cut the

ham into two equal parts and sent one-half to each of them. The result was fatal to the national aspirations of Italy! The Italian girl wrote him a charming note, polite and appreciative, but somewhat formal. The Yugoslav invited him to dinner and gave him some of the ham!

Less weighty reasons have been known to determine national sympathies. But whatever may have been the cause, the fact was plain that not only the Americans but the French and English in the disputed territory were openly sympathetic with Yugoslavia and hostile to Italy. There is little doubt that for the French and British, financial interests were at stake. For one reason or another, they were manifesting a more friendly interest in the race that tore down the Lion of Saint Mark from the wall in Spalato than for the people who had placed it there on a monument of their own heritage.

The little French steamer took us on to Ragusa. If Spalato is the most interesting of Dalmatian cities to the student of art and history; if Zara is the most modern, the most Italian, the most civilized; if Sebenico treasures the loveliest specimens of architecture and Cattaro has the most magnificent natural setting, Ragusa is the most fascinating, as it has always been the most independent of them all.

Shut into its blue harbor by the island of Locroma, the gray walls of the proud city of Ragusa rise straight out of the sea, curve gracefully around the shore and climb the hills to vine-hung battlemented towers that stand out above the orange roofs of the town against the solid rock of its mountain background, and fold in the houses clinging to it with a protection that seems inviolable. Yet Ragusa is an undefended city. Those marvelous mighty walls that seem impregnable have been reduced by modern methods to the sentimental rôle of the picturesque. Peaceful and picturesque as it is, and lacking the scars of war that one finds at Pola and Cattaro, Ragusa has the appearance of a war-scene on the stage. High up against the sky the Serbian guard pace back and forth, and squads of them are seen marching here and there through the sunny streets. Tier upon tier of dwelling-houses cling to the strong rock of the fortress wall, stair upon stair leads past them to the railed walk along the top and to the broad roofs of the flanking towers, and from the points of outlook as one ascends, the wide sea-view grows more and more

superb. Nothing could surpass the panorama of sea and rockbound islands from this height; while near at hand is the yellow and orange city glowing in the sunshine, with the dark blue waves washing its foundations far, far below and making a thin white line along the shore. And always close at hand, the red-capped guard, now silent and sullen, now friendly and talkative, their swarthy faces and their crosses and medals and ribbons telling more than words of the life they have been leading.

If Ragusa always refused to acknowledge the Venetian Doges, she cannot deny the testimony of the municipal hall, of the *dogana*, of the churches, of the delicate cloisters, all of which belong to the best traditions of Italian art. They contrast strangely with the semi-barbaric costumes and objets d'art that one finds in the streets to-day. The Croats sit in the market place, while columns and façades of Venetian Gothic, with their exquisite trceries, rise up against the over-towering hills under the southern sky.

Here there was hatred of Serbia deeper than hatred of Italy. It was at Ragusa that the Serbian chiefs, coming in immediately after the armistice, appropriated the contents of the treasury in the name of Jugoslavia, to the great indignation of the citizens.

Along the shore that stretches out beyond the city walls are many Italian villas set down among extensive gardens—terrace above terrace, pergola beyond pergola. Many had been deserted by their proprietors, and their vines were running riot; but flowers bloomed in profusion, while above them a fringe of olive orchards hung from the bare mountain heights and below them a sapphire sea dashed against yellow cliffs.

From the picturesque beauty of Ragusa we were plunged again into the turmoil of the Adriatic problem. For on the Italian destroyer which bore us northward to Zara, there was a group of many-minded persons. There was a major of the English army, a correspondent of the *London Times*, an Austrian officer returned from service in Herzegovina, an Italian citizen of Spalato with his little daughter, the Commander of the ship, and two open-minded Americans. Discussion ran high, literature and maps were evoked from handbags; and on the narrow deck of that gray warship opinions had free airing. Only the citizen of Spalato remained silent and withdrawn within himself. He

had the air of one to whom all words seem light. But now and then, on the edge of the group, he broke his silence and, in a few patient words, revealed his feeling. His little girl was as gay and pretty as her father was sober and plain. She wore her Italian colors proudly. There were no shadows in her sparkling eyes.

Wherever we met officers of the Italian navy we encountered the growing influence of D'Annunzio. He had become a hero three months before he led his army of volunteers into Fiume, and already his principle of non-renunciation had made compromise seem weakness. The navy was still smarting under the humiliation of having lost the Austrian fleet to Jugoslavia, an unexpected twist of fortune for which they blamed the French. A part of the fleet had been given over later and had been led captive into the harbor of Venice, where the King received them with proper ceremony. But the harm had been done to a sensitive people. And similar wrongs were multiplied before our eyes. Ever since the Allies conceived the possibility of destroying Austria-Hungary from within, Italy's share of the war and of the victory had been minimized. And though she had fought on in good faith and in the battles of the Piave and Vittorio Veneto had won overwhelming victories against an unbroken defense, as the number of her dead proves, the new nations which were parcels of Italy's ancient enemy had been "taken up" by France and England and America and by the same token Italy had been "dropped." It was not strange that in these waters the Italians held aloof while the others fraternized with the Jugoslavs.

Notwithstanding all this, our reception at Zara was friendly and cordial and Admiral Millo and the officers about him were in the best of spirits. Coming to Zara from the southern shore was like returning from some strange, semi-oriental land into the heart of Italy. Not the buildings alone, but the life of the streets, the shops, the boats along the shore, the people, the Venetian dialect, books, newspapers, the food one ate and the wine one drank, everything was Italian. Three days of radiant weather in Zara made one almost forget—many things. One could have believed everything settled harmoniously and peace established; and we were ready to accept the statement, because all appearances confirmed it, that the recipe for propaganda among those officers called for but one ingredient, *cortesía*.

A motor trip into the mountains revealed new beauties of the scene in which a drama of new nations and old was being acted. Through miles of level, fertile fields; past deep estuaries which bend in among the hills to form sapphire streams and lakes between the lowlands of emerald and the gray and purple heights beyond; up and up over the solid road, deeper and deeper into the mountains; climbing to a towered village that hung above our heads only to look down upon it a few minutes later as a tiny picture in the distance below; whirling around dizzy curves at a dizzy speed; we reached at length the top of the mountain pass where a mammoth slab of granite marks the confines of Croatia; then down again in a breathless descent, along the edge of precipices and under jagged overhanging cliffs, with a brief respite in the village of the Morlacchi where we walked about for a time among the villagers.

From Zara we returned to Pola on a destroyer of the newest type, where for once we knew luxury on the Adriatic; where life ran as merrily as on any pleasure yacht, and the rotten, roofless craft on which I had spent one whole day in the rain was forgotten, and the stories of threadbare escapes from the Austrians in this same destroyer among these sun-bathed islands seemed to belong to a bygone age. Yet even here there was but one subject uppermost in the minds of all, but one discussion always to the fore, but one immediate problem seeking solution; though these Italian officers were able to throw it aside for hours of lively badi-nage. It was always there, however, behind wit and anecdote. And as we crossed to Venice the next day, our memory of their gaiety was troubled with thoughts of what the future might hold.

No myriad laughter of blue and silver waves, no splendor of cliffs and mountains, but only the patience and good will of men can lift the burden from the shores of the Adriatic Sea.

GERTRUDE SLAUGHTER.